

LET'S EXPLORE---

Historical Monmouth



Simple bridge over a small stream accentuates charm of Holmdel area.

Staff Photos, Tuttle

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM
MONMOUTH COUNTY history would be better served if so many broad concrete highways didn't lead through to the shore. Perhaps no other county in the state has so many cars whizzing over its roads on week-ends or such a low proportion of motorists stopping to wonder about historical markers or old inns. By the time Monmouth is reached the cool Atlantic Ocean is much too tempting to permit absorption with the past.

That's understandable, but not quite so apparent are the reasons why many back roads to shore points are so little used. These are the roads which have survived since the earliest days of the state's history, the roads along which the motorist can gain double benefits—some freedom from traffic and some close association with the pulsing beat of the early days of New Jersey. These are the roads which follow the winding trails Indians took on their way to the shore on clam-digging or fishing expedi-

tions long before the White Man discovered the ocean's benefits.

The key to inland "back roads" to the coast between Point Pleasant and Long Branch is the traffic circle at Old Bridge. Here S-28 leads eastward toward Matawan and a lesser-used road goes south to Englishtown and eventually to Freehold. Either of these routes offers many variations, and a glance at them will serve to prove the point and perhaps induce the urge for additional study of Monmouth County.

Old Bridge is easily reached from the northern part of the state. A suggested route from Elizabeth is down Route 27 as far as the traffic light intersection just beyond the animal hospital at Stelton. Camp Kilmer signs definitely mark the spot. Here a left turn is made to join Route 1, then a right turn is made over the Raritan River as far as the traffic circle outside of New Brunswick. Three-quarters of the way around the circle pick up Route S-28, by signs pointing to Old Bridge.

OLD BRIDGE traffic circle can be seen in the distance at the top of a long downward grade. For a pleasant and seldom-used side excursion, which will add only a mile to the trip, turn right in the middle of the hill (before the circle is reached) for the quaint village of Spotswood. During the Revolution Spotswood was a thriving town, where a charcoal iron furnace, a forge and flour mills were operated by Tories until the state militia took over. Turn left in the center of Spotswood beyond the cemetery, pass pleasant Devoe Lake, and enjoy a drive along miles of roads most shore visitors don't know exist.

South from Spotswood, a left turn is made on a concrete road at the overhead blinker for Englishtown, which achieved great importance during a few June days in 1778 when Continental troops fought the Redcoats in the fields surrounding Freehold.

Washington's army was in Pennsylvania after the brutal Winter at Valley Forge when word came that Gen.

Clinton had decided to abandon Philadelphia and move to New York. The Americans crossed the Delaware and a conference of 12 generals hastily summoned at Hopewell decided on June 24, 1778, to intercept Clinton's army as it moved across Monmouth toward Sandy Hook for a rendezvous with British ships. Washington reached Englishtown June 27 and the following morning, a Sunday, he ordered troops under Gen. Lee to attack.

Lee's hesitation, whether caused by treachery, fear or the inability to make a decision, probably cost the Colonial forces a major victory which might have brought an early end to the War for Independence. Lee's troops advanced to within sight of the British at Freehold then fell back into the woods in confusion without firing a shot. Washington's anger led to a quick court-martial for Lee. The building where he was tried and dismissed from the army is now the Englishtown Inn. The building was erected in 1732 and its careful

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Englishtown Inn, where General Lee was tried because of his failure to advance after the Battle of Monmouth. The inn dates back to 1732.



Grave of Philip Freneau, "the poet of the Revolution," on a knoll overlooking the rolling Monmouth County countryside near Freneau.



Mrs. J. Mabel Brown, president of Monmouth County Historical Association, checks ship model in Sports Room of group's Freehold museum.



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preservation is accentuated by sparkling white paint. On the front porch is an old water pump, still in use.

For the rest of the story of the Battle of Monmouth (and incidentally the route to the shore) turn right at the inn, then at the blinker turn left. At the next overhead blinker, about two miles east of Englishtown, a left turn is made for Tennent Church, the western boundary of the battle. The church, where services still are held every Sunday at 11 A. M., was built in 1751 and its pews and aisles were used to treat men wounded in the battle.

THE door to the church usually is open and the visitor is afforded an exceptional view of the interior of a colonial house of worship. High-backed pews, with narrow seats, attest to the discomforts of early church-going. The old-fashioned pulpit, with its overhead sounding board, faces the clustered pews, while around the church a balcony (used in colonial days by slaves) shuts in the congregation. A plaque near the pulpit tells of the Rev. William Tennent, who died in 1777 after having served the community for 43 years and six months. He is buried under the church and has given his name to the building and the surrounding country.

Back on the main road again, the way cuts through the lands over which the battle surged after Lee's indecision. On the right, midway between Tennent and Freehold, is the well from which Molly Pitcher is said to have drawn water to slacken the thirst of American troops during the battle. Historians tend to scoff at the well, declaring that it is more likely that the water was taken from a nearby spring. However, some one takes the well seriously because recently the surrounding area has been cleared of weeds and levelled. A path has been put in and two big stones, bronze marker size, are awaiting plaques.

Historians debate the authenticity of the well, but there is general agreement that there was a Molly Pitcher, that Washington commended her on the field of battle and that the temperature rose to 96 degrees that June day while soldiers dropped from heat and exhaustion. Molly—the wife of a

sergeant from Carlisle, Pa.—appeared with water for parched throats. Whether the water came from the well or from a spring wasn't questioned then nor was it disputed later when Molly was awarded a lifetime pension of \$40 a month for her deeds.

Route 9 passes high over the road beyond the well, with signs temptingly pointing the way to shore spots. The underpass into Freehold is recommended, however, for both a look at an interesting town and a fairly traffic-free entrance to the coast. All the way into Freehold the railroad runs to the right and often potato-filled cars clog the tracks, telling of the crop which has brought prosperity to surrounding farms and brisk business to Freehold.

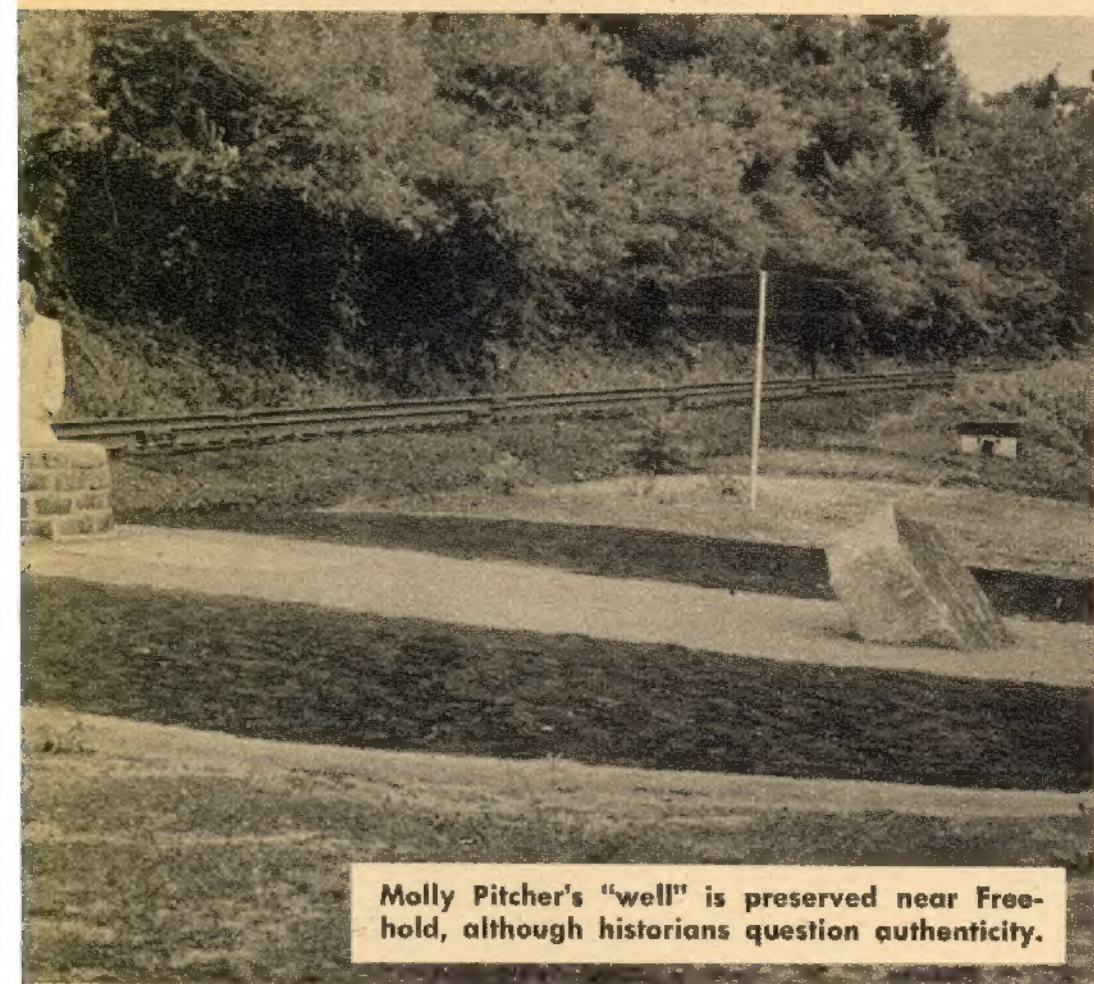
WHITE-SHINGLED St. Peter's Episcopal Church, one of the state's oldest churches, is on the left directly across the street from the railroad station in Freehold center. The church was built by Quakers in 1683 at Topanemus, four miles north of Freehold. Later it was moved to Freehold and during the Battle of Monmouth it was used as a hospital by the British. Left, past the church, is the way to the coast, but another left turn at the Court House a block beyond is advised for an additional look at Monmouth County history.

A few hundred feet behind the Court House is the Monmouth Battle



It's time to feed the ducks at pl

RICH IN REVOLUTION LORE



Molly Pitcher's "well" is preserved near Freehold, although historians question authenticity.

Monument, erected in 1884 on the spot where the conflicts centered. Five bronze tablets at the base of the lofty shaft tell the battle story. Starting with the conference at Hopewell, the tablets show Lt. Col. Nathaniel Ramsey attempting unsuccessfully to hold off the British, Molly Pitcher, Washington rallying his troops after Lee's defeat and the charge of Mad Anthony Wayne which turned back the British. Further up the shaft are the bronze coat-of-arms of the original 13 colonies and atop the monument is a statue of Liberty Triumphant.

Across the street from the monument is the exceptionally fine museum and library of Monmouth County Historical Association. The association, now finishing its 50th year, built the museum in 1931, faithfully following colonial plans. The group's treasures are on display in carefully planned rooms, each showing a different phase of Monmouth County progress. Exhibits include antique furniture, excellent paintings, rare china, uniforms, costumes, dolls and invaluable books and pamphlets. The museum is open daily except Monday from 11 A. M. to 5 P. M. and Sundays from 2 to 5 P. M. Admission is charged only on Thursdays—then the fee is 25 cents.

A county so noted for its pleasures and its sports naturally would give them emphasis, even in its museum, and one of the most unusual rooms is



Pleasant Devoe Lake, Spotswood.

the Sports Room. Here the famous horses, the great races (both horse and boat), the swimmers, the hunters, the fishermen and all other sports and sportsmen are remembered. Models of sailing ships dominate the room and on the book shelves is a complete library of Monmouth County outdoor life.

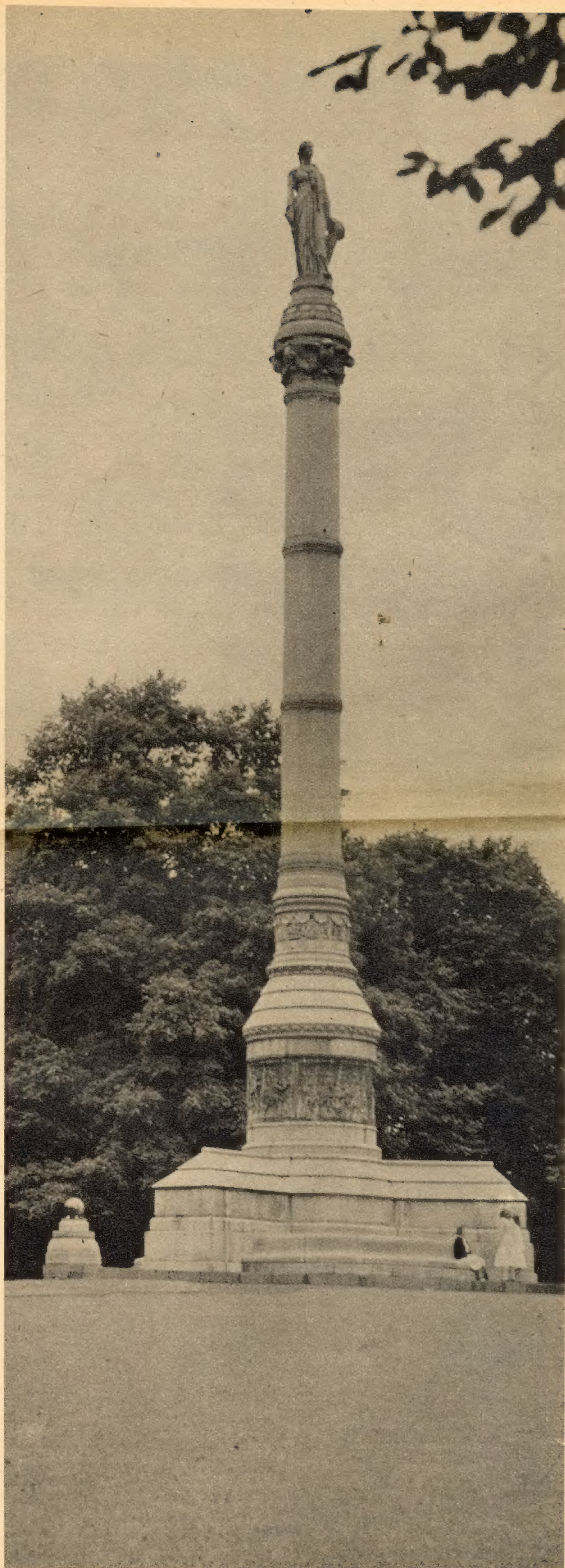
FREEHOLD is the hub of the Monmouth County traffic wheel, with roads running like spokes in all directions. A splendid route to the shore between Belmar and Point Pleasant lies in the road directly across from the Court House, which leads south to a traffic light where a left turn is made for Adelphia. Straight through lies Belmar, but a right turn for Farmingdale about three miles beyond Adelphia carries over good roads to Allaire, Allenwood and Manasquan or Point Pleasant.

Another interesting route is that through Colts Neck. This starts at the end of the main street beyond the Court House, then crosses Route 34 on a traffic light. When the roads are especially jammed this can be a good route to Asbury Park, although several miles longer.

If you happen to be the often-to-the-shore type, an interesting alternate route from Old Bridge by way of Freneau might appeal. At the Old Bridge circle, follow S-28 around the circle to the signs marked "Matawan." Seven miles east of the circle, at a traffic light, turn right in Alternate Route 4, leading to Freehold. About a mile south of the traffic light a house set far back from the road, with two long rows of maple trees leading up to the front door, is the former home of Philip Freneau, "the poet of the Revolution." The estate, called "Poet's Dream," is privately-owned.

Freneau's family moved to the homestead when he was 10 and he lived there most of his life until he died at the age of 80 while trying to reach home during a severe snowstorm. After he was graduated from Princeton, where he was a classmate of James Madison, he wrote poetry which violently supported the cause of the Revolution and won him the praise and friendship of Washington. Throughout his life, during periods when he taught school, captained a

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Monmouth Battle Monument, erected in 1884 to commemorate famous fight. Five bronze plaques on pedestal depict scenes in the battle.

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sailing vessel and struggled against poverty, he wrote the verses which decades after his death earned him the title of "the father of American poetry."

THE poet's grave is beneath a great tree on a knoll overlooking the pleasant rolling countryside. Freneau is said to have sat on the knoll while he composed the impassioned poems to the beautiful Eleanor Forman, who later became his wife.

Just beyond Wickatunk, marked by a post office in an apparently remodelled roadstand, is a left turn which heads for Red Bank and Long Branch through exceptionally quiet country. The turn is in the middle of a short dip in the road and is easily identified by an electrical substation along the road at the right. Eastward is the spreading farm of Marlboro State Hospital for mental patients, then the country becomes wooded and rural all the way to an intersection with Route 34. On week-ends this crossing is likely to be difficult but on week-days it is easily accomplished. If traffic is especially heavy, the recommended course is a right turn on Route 34 with the traffic, followed by a left turn at the Colts Neck traffic light.

However, if Route 34 can easily be crossed, the road to Red Bank and Long Branch through Holmdel is worthwhile. The center of the village is a single street lined with old white houses and great trees. Past the village, on a hillside to the left, are the spreading grape arbors on the farm of the late Assemblyman Theron MacCampbell. For many years the annual Scottish games were held each Labor Day on Mr. MacCampbell's estate.

Beyond is Lincroft, whose history dates back to 1680. Here at an intersection the road left leads to the Red Bank area and the road right carries toward Eatontown and Long Branch or any of the shore towns north of Asbury Park.



LEFT: The 197-year-old Tennent Church where wounded were brought during Battle of Monmouth. BELOW: Church's interior, preserved almost exactly as it was during Revolution. ABOVE: Map of Explorer's tour, tapping interesting section from minor highways.

